

Protecting and nurturing children  
is a primary duty in our society.

# Children

## Kids come first

Kids come first. We share a universal, bedrock belief that all good parents put their children's needs ahead of their own. This fundamental value - the value of nurturing and investing in the next generation - is even enshrined in our state constitution, which declares the education of "all children . . . without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex" to be "the paramount duty" of the state.

We all recognize that there is an intrinsic value in every child, and that protecting and nurturing children is the most important function of any human society. In our society - and in our time - we also recognize that preparing the next generation for citizenship and leadership of the world's most powerful democracy confers on us a special responsibility. Today's children will inherit the most scientifically advanced, morally complicated, globally interconnected society and economy in the history of humanity. To succeed in such a society, they will need more from us - and more from our public schools - than we have ever provided before.

**Children Need to Learn** • That's why, in 1993, our state renewed its commitment to its "paramount duty" by implementing a bold, statewide school improvement plan based on rigorous academic standards, tests that measure whether students meet them, and focused efforts to improve student learning. These reforms have produced significant gains in academic achievement. They have also stimulated debate about the role of tests and the best ways to improve struggling schools. But behind the debate about school improvement lies another set of issues - issues about how to ensure that all children and teens come to school ready and able to learn.

### Risk and protective factors for children: Success in school is critical

*Research shows that children who fail in elementary school, and those who are simply not committed to school, are significantly more at risk for drug use, pregnancy, dropping out of school, or becoming violent when they are teens. On the other hand, opportunities for success and recognition in school, along with clear school messages about healthy behaviors helps protect children from these problems.*

School Risk Factors	Teenage Problem Outcomes				
	Substance Abuse	Delinquency	Teen Pregnancy	School Drop-Out	Violence
Academic failure beginning in late elementary school	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of commitment to school	X	X	X	X	X

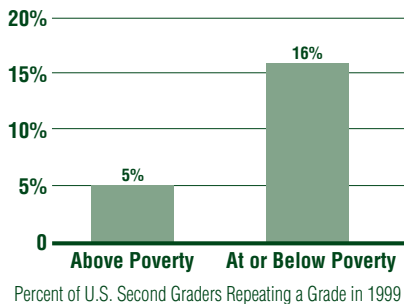
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*An "X" means that two or more rigorous studies followed specific children for many years and determined that these risk factors, early in life, were related to the identified problem behaviors later in life.*

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## Children who must repeat second grade

*Those from poor families are far more likely to experience early academic failure*



Source: Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 2000 (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), page 298. On the Internet at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/00trends/index.htm>.

No one doubts that factors external to school have a profound impact on students' ability to learn. Poverty has been thoroughly documented as a leading impediment to children's academic success. Other factors, such as family mobility, mental illness, drug or alcohol use, child abuse and neglect, and out-of-home placements further reduce children's chances for success in school and in life.

If we are to succeed at Washington's paramount duty - the education of "all children residing within its borders" - we clearly have to address the out-of-school obstacles to learning. This is the only way we can get a full return on the investment we are making in improving public schools.

DSHS is a partner in the work of helping kids come to school ready to learn. Parents, guardians and foster parents are, of course, the primary caregivers and first teachers of children. And relatives, neighbors, religious groups, scout troops, sports leagues and other community organizations weave a web of protection, support, and guidance around most of our state's children.

This web of protective factors works most of the time, for most children. But some children don't have a strong enough protective web to shelter them from harm, or to provide them with a solid foundation for success in school and in life.

**Children Need Strong Families** • Children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs, children at risk of abuse or neglect, children from families experiencing mental illness, children who live in poverty and who lack medical and dental care - these are children for whom success in school is likely to be elusive.

Educational success is just one of many goals we have for our children. We want all children to be safe. We want all children to learn to be kind, honest, responsible, moral people. We want all children to have fun, to be happy, and above all, to be well loved so that they will learn to love others. We want all of our children - regardless of any disability or disadvantage they may face - to get the upbringing they need to reach their fullest potential.

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That's why DSHS and other government agencies provide programs and services to help families succeed, and to mend the holes that sometimes develop in the web of family and community support for children. These programs aim to protect children from harm, improve parenting skills and family stability, and when necessary, protect children by placing them in foster care or group care. The success of these programs depends on the neighbors, extended family members, friends, doctors or teachers who report suspected abuse or neglect, the local agencies that teach parenting and household skills, and the foster parents or relatives who shelter children when their parents cannot. DSHS's role is to marshal and manage these resources, whenever and wherever needed.

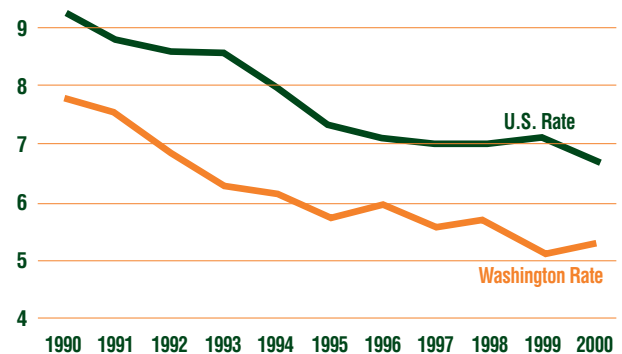
**Children Need Health Care** • DSHS also coordinates an array of services for children with special needs. Our Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program helps identify (and in many cases overcome) early developmental delays. When children are found to have lasting developmental disabilities, such as mental retardation or autism, their families receive special services to help them cope with those disabilities and make the most of their children's lives.

When children have serious mental illnesses and their families can't afford treatment, DSHS, in partnership with the federal Medicaid program and county-based Regional Support Networks, provides mental health services.

Children also need adequate health care in order to thrive, and Washington has been a national leader in ensuring that they get it. We provide prenatal care to moms and health insurance for low-income children. In fact, 41 percent of births in Washington state are paid for with public funds, and 36 percent of children have publicly funded health insurance.

## We are making progress in reducing the number of infant deaths

*Comparison of infant deaths per 1,000 births*



Source: Washington State Department of Health  
Vital Statistics and Centers for Disease Control-  
Wonder for national data





# Children

**A tiny baby finds love and learning in foster homes and from teachers...and grows up to pass these gifts along to the next generation.**



Photo courtesy Lucy Mack

Lucy Mack became a child in foster care when she was just four months old. During the next six years, she lived in a series of foster homes. Despite this difficult start in life, she recently graduated with honors from Kettle Falls High School, earned two scholarships, and became a successful student at Eastern Washington University, where she is preparing to become a teacher.

Read Lucy's story at: Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>

**Children Need to be Lifted Out of Poverty •** DSHS also plays a vital role in the lives of children whose families find themselves in poverty. In 1997, WorkFirst replaced the previous welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. WorkFirst has helped more than 138,000 Washington parents find and keep jobs and increase their family income. WorkFirst benefits children immediately by providing them with comprehensive health insurance, family food assistance, and subsidized child care. And in the long term, WorkFirst benefits children by helping families escape the single most powerful predictor of academic failure - poverty itself.

Because poverty strikes disproportionately those families who are racial and cultural minorities and those who are new to this country, DSHS programs have a special importance in minority and immigrant communities. Racial disparities in academic achievement continue to plague our public schools; without effective anti-poverty strategies like WorkFirst and other DSHS services there can be no doubt that these disparities would be far worse.

**Children Need to Be Cared for While Their Parents are at Work •** In a society where working parents are the norm, DSHS provides one service that is essential to families of all income levels: the licensing and monitoring of child care homes and centers. This consumer protection function can never be an absolute guarantee of child care quality, but it does establish clear standards, a baseline of health and safety protection, a process for reporting and addressing substandard care, and an overall framework for long-term improvement in child care quality.

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DSHS also subsidizes child care costs for over 70,000 families each month. This subsidy is available to all low-wage workers with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Subsidized child care has been made possible by savings achieved by the WorkFirst program. As more people find out about and use these subsidies, however, it may be difficult to continue to finance them with caseload savings.

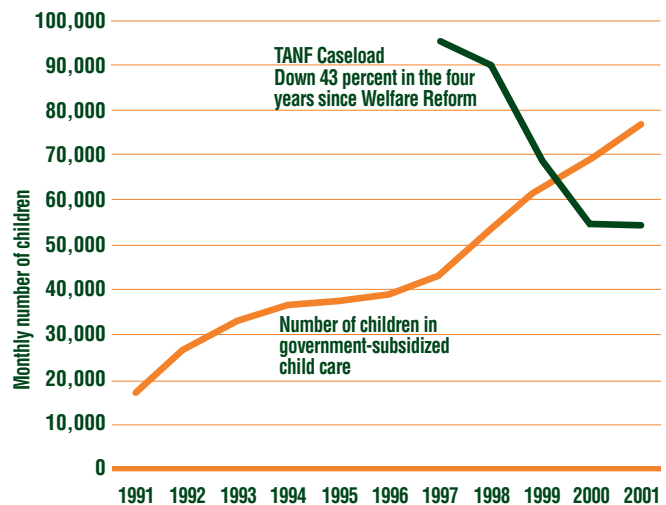
## Young Offenders Need to Turn Their Lives

**Around** • DSHS's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration is responsible for caring for Washington's most serious juvenile offenders - many of whom have substance abuse problems, mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, and weak family support systems. Children as young as eight and young people through the age of 20 are confined to JRA facilities, where they receive intensive rehabilitation services and vocational training, usually followed by parole supervision when they return to the community.

**If we are to succeed at Washington's paramount duty – the education of “all children residing within its borders” – we have to address the out-of-school obstacles to learning. Otherwise we cannot achieve a full return on the investment we are making in improving public schools.**

**Children Learn from What We Do** • Children learn from the moment they are born. Learning is what children are wired to do, in every waking moment of their young lives. That's why DSHS leads a public/private partnership called BrainNet to train practitioners and educate parents about the critical importance of early learning. We are all aware, however, that kids learn more from what we do than what we say. And what we do shapes what our children will become.

## TANF\* Recipients able to get and keep jobs with help of subsidized child care



Source: The DSHS Budget Division and Research and Data Analysis  
\*TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families